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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Notification of nuclear tests

Note by the Secretary-General

Pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 41/59 N of 3 December 1986 and 42/38 C of 30 November 1987, a communication has been received from Australia, dated 1 July 1992, which is reproduced in the annex to the present note.

* A/47/150.

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ANNEX

Information provided by States

AUSTRALIA

[Original: English]

[1 July 1992]

1. The Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations has the honour to refer to resolution 42/38 C, entitled "Notification of nuclear tests", paragraph 3 of which requests States that, while not themselves conducting nuclear explosions, possess data on such events to make those data available to the Secretary-General.

2. In accordance with that request, attached are details of nuclear explosions detected by Australia from January to March 1992 (see appendix I), as well as explanatory memorandum (see appendix II).

APPENDIX I

Quarterly reports on presumed underground nuclear explosions

January-March 1992

Month 1992	Day	Universal time	Locality	Estimated body-wave magnitude	Estimated yield (kilotonnes)	Sequence number
January			nil			
February			nil			
March	26	1630	Nevada	5.5	40-150	92/1

Notes: Information given was derived from Australian seismological facilities and from institutions in other countries cooperating in the monitoring of earthquakes and nuclear explosions.

Unless otherwise noted, the estimated body-wave magnitude is that published by the United States National Earthquake Information Center and is based on observations of magnitude obtained from around the world, including from Australia.

The yields are estimated using empirical equations, but there is no single agreed formula for the determination of yields.

The yields estimated from these relations are not sufficiently accurate to determine compliance with international treaties.

APPENDIX II

Explanatory note

When a nuclear device is detonated underground, seismic waves radiate out in all directions. In order to establish that an underground nuclear explosion has taken place, pinpoint its location and estimate the size or yield of the blast, seismologists attempt to detect and analyse the several distinct types of seismic waves generated by the blast. Many factors affect the strength and clarity of these seismic waves, particularly the efficiency with which the explosion transmits energy to the surrounding earth. This efficiency is, in turn, dependent on local geological conditions such as the hardness and water content of the rock surrounding the explosion. Knowledge of the path through the earth that the seismic signals have travelled is also important.

An international network of seismic stations would add significantly to confidence in the ability to detect and locate the source of underground nuclear explosions, whenever conducted. Australia is actively engaged in the international effort to create such a network and, in addition, has established a number of bilateral links for seismic cooperation. Experts estimate that confidence in an international seismic network would extend to coupled explosions with yields down to about 5 kilotonnes and possibly as low as 1 kilotonne: beyond this, distinguishing nuclear explosions from earthquakes and other seismic "noise" becomes a more difficult task and supplementary measures may be necessary.

Estimating the yield of an underground explosion by remote seismic means is especially difficult on the basis of available data. The relationship between seismic signals and yield is not fixed but subject to the vagaries of geology and a number of other unknown factors. At the present time we do not have openly available the large and authoritative database of explosions of known yield in various locations and geological conditions necessary to define the relationship with maximum confidence. This is why the footnotes to the tables in the present report stress that the estimated yields are not sufficiently reliable to determine compliance with international treaties. All these questions are being actively addressed in international forums.